

Four-story hotel moves forward to town council

By Jesse Moya, jmoya@taosnews.com

The Taos News, 5/25/2017

The Town of Taos Planning and Zoning Commission voted 5-0 Thursday (May 18) to recommend approval for construction of a four-story Holiday Inn Express to the town council.

An estimated 50 people packed the town hall council chambers, many there to voice their opinions on the controversial project.

During a three-hour meeting, members of the public were limited by commission Chairman James Pollard to no more than two minutes each for comments due to the long list of people who signed up to speak. Following the comments, the commission voted 5-0 to recommend that the town council approve the hotel's construction on Paseo del Pueblo Sur near Ranchos de Taos.

Commission member and Realtor Pavel Lukes recused himself from the vote due to a conflict of interest.

The commission has rejected the hotel application three times before, as several issues with the project did not meet the town's code standards.

Pollard affirmed during the meeting that the commission's job was to ensure everything was in order on paper before any construction begins.

Several times during the meeting, verbal exchanges between the audience and the commission became heated, prompting Pollard to call for a sergeant-at-arms to be present in an attempt to keep order.

The commission meeting was held to ensure hotel developer Jay Batra had completed all the necessary paperwork for the project. Planning Director Louis Fineberg said during the meeting that the staff in the Taos Planning Department believed the applications met code.

The proposal to build a four-story hotel has split residents in Taos.

"We need new hotel rooms. That's not under debate. We need more jobs. That's not under debate," said Taos resident Ken Manning during the meeting.

Manning, along with several others who spoke out against the hotel, said they are not against the development, but want to make sure everything is done in a fair manner involving the citizens of the town and following all proper avenues. Taos has been split by this hotel issue since the first public meetings in 2016. Some of the town's residents have taken issue with the project - not because of the 85 rooms the hotel will bring but because they are unhappy with how local government has treated the issue.

Others at the meeting spoke out in support of the \$89 million project and cited a need for economic growth in the area and additional hotel rooms for events in Taos. Participants in the audience even applauded the work of Batra and his perseverance for trying to bring this to Taos.

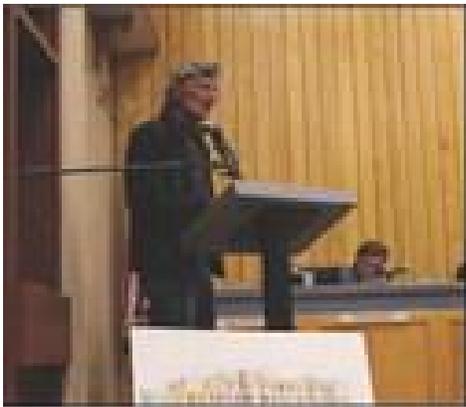
“Are we helping our community at all by saying no to this? We’re not. We’re keeping fresh money from coming into our community,” said resident Jennifer Matsuzaki. “Our businesses are closing in the center of our community because we can’t bring groups into our town.”

Both Batra and hotel architect Tafazzul Hussain spoke during the meeting on the changes from the previously rejected version of the hotel project. After the vote, Batra said he spoke with many people who have been positive about the project and said those who have a negative view of the hotel are entitled to their opinions.

Some remained unconvinced that the project was right for Taos and spoke out passionately against the project.

“Culturally and traditionally, this does not fit with this community,” said resident Tanya Vigil. “It’s not for our children.”

Following the meeting, Commissioner Billy Romero’s business was targeted in what the commissioner believes was a vandalism attack directly related to his position on the commission. The tires on the delivery trucks of Romero’s Rio Grande Propane were slashed. While acting Taos Police Chief Lt. David Maggio said police had no suspects and no such motive at the time of the vandalism could be pinpointed, Taos police are currently looking for any information regarding the incident.



Taos resident Stephen Dunn speaks out against the Holiday Inn Express project. Some Taos residents spoke for and others spoke against the proposed four-story hotel project Thursday (May 18), which has been in the works for nearly two years.

Jesse Moya